



Blisworth yard 30 Dec 1965. Hunslet locomotive 49 stands with empty wagons ready to push them to the quarry. I have to say that I know nothing of the industry that hasn't been gleaned from this book. The following is a précis for the benefit of the members of this Society.

## The Ironstone Quarries of the Midlands

Part three of the book by Eric Tonks.

### The Northampton Area

Seemingly, quarrying for

ironstone came to Northamptonshire area in 1852 when the first quarry opened in Blisworth. Eventually the area around Northampton became the cradle of the industry with nine of the twenty-eight systems beginning in the early 1950's.

Most of these were in the south of the county and close to the rail links to London. The question arises were those the rail links following the industry, or vice versa? The canals were also in use so even these may have been doing the same thing following the progress of railway building near to the outcrops of ironstone.

The earliest known quarry was at Hardingstone and several others had been closed long before adequate recording had been made. Some mysteries, such as the site of the first Blisworth quarry remain but the wealth of information at the

Records Office left by eminent historians, such as the nationally known George Freeston and Len Bootman have left future historians with much to do.

A book, 'Mineral Statistics' by Robert Brunt, chronicles the rise and fall of the iron industry and proclaims Blisworth as the first workings in the nineteenth century. Much more information was forthcoming from the Records office in the late 70's to give a much clearer picture. Iron ore was revealed at Blisworth when the Grand Union Canal was first cut, but there is no record of any commercial exploitation before 1850's and despite the opening of the London and Birmingham railway line in 1837 the canal still provided the means of iron ore transport from Blisworth for at least the next fifty years.

Apart from today's heavy traffic Blisworth is now a much quieter village and houses commuters rather than agricultural workers. Successive developments from the mid nineteenth century seemingly cut off the village from Northampton, by the railway embankment for instance. It was then that the village became a centre for the production of iron ore and in later years became the sole producer because of its greater reserves.

Précis. With grateful thanks to the estate of Eric Tonks, author and past-President of the Industrial Railway Society

Photo by G. H. Starmer